



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# News Release

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## **5 DOMINICANS SENTENCED TO 73 YEARS IN PRISON FOLLOWING AN ICE HUMAN SMUGGLING INVESTIGATION**

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that five Dominicans convicted for human smuggling were sentenced here yesterday by a federal judge to 73 years in prison.

Leonardo Hilario-Hilario, Kennedi Martinez, Fernando Jose-Milan, Delgadino Peguero and Santiago Rodriguez were indicted on Dec. 8, 2004 for alien smuggling following an ICE investigation that revealed that the men were responsible for a smuggling scheme involving 93 illegal aliens destined to reach the north coast of Puerto Rico. The 93 illegal aliens were boarded on an overcrowded, fragile vessel that departed from the Dominican Republic on Dec. 3, 2004. The vessel capsized during the dangerous voyage killing seven Dominican nationals.

Despite the tremendous efforts by Sector San Juan, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Puerto Rico Police Department's Maritime Unit to rescue those aboard the capsizing "yola", five women, Luz M. Rodriguez-Burgos, Ana Rosa-Mayi, Ana S. Garcia-Garcia, Raquel M. Diaz-Castillo and Secundina Lopez-Sanchez died before the rescuers arrived to the scene. Two males, Rafael Martinez-Bello and Inocencio Argas-Lora also perished in their attempt to make it to Puerto Rico illegally.

Yesterday, federal judge Jay Garcia of the U.S. Court for the District of Puerto Rico, sentenced Delgadino Peguero and Kennedi Martinez to 15 years and eight months in prison. Fernando Jose Millan was sentenced to 14 years and eight months. Santiago Rodriguez and Leonardo Hilario-Hilario were sentenced to 10 and 17 years respectively.

According to witnesses, Leonardo Hilario-Hilario, sentenced to 17 years in prison, played a leadership role in the tragic smuggling venture by coordinating via cellular telephone with contacts in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and giving instructions to other boat captains.

"The conviction and sentencing of these five human smugglers should send a strong message to those engaged in the illicit business of human smuggling," said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent-in-charge of ICE in Puerto Rico. "We are determined to stop these unscrupulous smugglers who have no regard for the loss of human life. We encourage people who want to come

to the United States to use legal means and not to risk their lives by dealing with criminals.”

Since Oct. 1, 2004, 2,622 migrants from the Dominican Republic have been intercepted crossing the Mona Passage attempting to reach the United States illegally.

Disrupting and dismantling human smuggling and trafficking rings has been a top priority for ICE since the agency was established in March 2003, given the potential threat that these organizations pose both to national security and public safety. With ICE’s broad authorities for enforcing immigration and customs laws and its expertise in financial investigations, the agency is able to pursue human smuggling organizations more aggressively than ever before. As a result, ICE agents arrested more than 1,630 human smugglers nationwide in fiscal year 2004.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*